

✠ ✠ ✠ ✠ THE
PRODIGAL'S
PRAYER ✠ ✠



C. HERBERT SCHOLEY

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The prodigal's prayer

The Prodigal's Prayer

The Prodigal's Prayer

BY

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DEDICATED
AS A
TOKEN OF LOVE
TO
MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER
C. H. S.

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“The Prodigal’s Prayer”

The text is in the seventh chapter of the gospel according to St. Matthew, the seventh verse, —“ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

Do Christians possess a magical charm or talisman? Alladin of the Arabian Knights could rub a ring or a lamp and food, treasures, palaces were his. Every want was satisfied. Life is universally the creation of wants and then the attempt to satisfy them. Did Christ promise a panacea for all these longings?

That marvellous sermon on the mount is packed full of principles according to which we should order our lives. It is full of suggestions by

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which we can make living easier and better for ourselves and for others. Then we have a great secret of success here in the words of the text? Can we simply *ask*, and thus *possess* happiness? Can we simply *seek*, and thus *get* wealth? Can we simply *knock*, and thus have opened to us an abiding place of peace? Does Christ promise *this*?

Of course you will remember that these words according to St. Mark were uttered by Jesus after He had taught the disciples the Lord's prayer. So they bear on the question of prayer, but cannot mean that all the disciples' wishes without distinction, even those which are unwarranted and pernicious, shall be fulfilled. Jesus has only declared that the asking and the seeking shall receive an answer. But whether it will be precisely what was sought for is another question. Indeed something entirely *different* from that desired may be the petitioner's portion.

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“What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?” (Matt. vii. 9.) Surely a father would not be so heartless as in mockery to give his hungry son a stone! Yet a son does not always get what he asks. Nor do men in *general* get what they seek. Nor do Christians for their *knocking* have doors *opened* through their difficulties. Yet why should *not* these sincere desires be granted? For “if ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” (Matt. vii. 11.)

A desire may seem simple and safe enough to grant according to human wisdom. But as Jesus only gives assurance that the heavenly Father *will give good things* to them that ask, there is involved something more lasting than the present satisfaction. *What* that something is which may

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transform good gifts into evil or evil into good ones, is worth discovering.

There is a well-known Bible-story of a father who was most liberal in gifts to his two sons. The experiences of each of these characters give some insight into the value and into the meaning of gratified wishes.

“A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.” (Luke xv. 11, 12.) The younger son prays his father to grant a certain favor. Nay, he does not simply make a request, but he rather demands of his father that to him be given what he had a possible right to claim. What he seeks is possession of property which by inheritance would be left to him.

Was this young man asking properly? From the narrative we gain a hint of the home life of this young fellow. A father and two sons are

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evidently living together in circumstances of comfort and affluence. The father is a respected and just man, with great pride in and love for his sons. The elder son is apparently a practical, conservative man of affairs relieving his ageing father from the worry and management of his numerous interests. The younger son has probably just come of age, is full of the impetuosity of youth, loves his father in an unconscious way, but finds his brother of a too cold and uncompanionable disposition, so that perhaps a little estrangement has grown up between the brothers.

The younger feels that he is being ignored in the management of the estate. “If I had only a little more say, a bigger part of the farm would have been sowed in grain the past season and so great profit been made by selling at the high prices now prevailing. But no! my elder brother was too conservative, altogether too

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slow. If he had only listened to me he would have found out that all the family brains had not come to the first-born. I will just show my brother and father that they had not half realized what a clever fellow I am. I’ll make my mark!”

The father gratifies this personal, free, willful choice of his son, and “divided unto them his living.” We shall not criticise the father. Some would criticise the son’s motive in seeking possession of the wealth and say that he wanted it with the sole desire of escaping from the order and discipline of his home to waste his substance in riotous living. But let us not blind ourselves in beginning the story of his career by being prejudiced against him.

The younger son was like many another young man, who has demanded his portion because he has felt that he must start out and make his own way in the world. Can we not imagine

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how in the first few days of his new possession the younger son went out especially early every morning to see that his flock of sheep and little drove of cattle were rightly cared for. And then one day in what high spirits he came in saying, “Father, I had a great bit of news to-day and have taken advantage of it. I heard, from one who knows, that the merchants of Tyre cannot get enough wool for cloth to fill their order for the troops of Macedonia. We’ll be able to get almost any price we ask for our spring shearing. And so before the news got out, I made a good trade with our neighbor Laban, and I’ve got sheep for all my cattle!”

“A fine bargain you’ve made,” probably sniffed the elder brother, “for I believe Laban’s flock is tainted with mange.”

“Don’t worry,” said the father, “this may turn out well as I have known such to do before. But, my

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boy, I am afraid you were a little foolish to trade off all your cattle.”

Looking after his big flock of sheep at length became rather monotonous. And why wouldn’t his father and brother let him have the liberty and enjoyment of planting his fields and managing his own affairs just as he pleased! He was confident he could succeed well enough by himself.

Well, it was after *not many days*, after the crops had been put in, and the work was a little slack awaiting the time for cultivation, that the younger brother having busied his mind with little plans, said, “Father, there isn’t much to see to here now. You know I am anxious about my wool venture, and I’ve been thinking that if I only went to Tyre I could watch the market and sell to better advantage than by staying away off here.” So he collected his valuables, realized some money on whatever he could, and having gathered all to-

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gether, took his journey into a far country.

Nothing develops a young man so much as getting away from home. Take from him the thoughtful care of loving parents and make him rely upon himself. Deprive him of that dependent yielding to the continual comfort with which fond hearts would enfold him. Force him to think for himself, provide for himself, struggle in competition with other men and you make that home-leaving son a *man*. Or, perhaps you un-make him, if there is in his character that something which can turn good gifts into evil. How many a father’s blessing has followed his son to the great city where he was to make his mark. But there, how black has been the mark which the devil has helped him make—if that young man has set up as his ideal the serving of self, which is the bond of partnership with Satan.

In the parable Christ states the man-

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ner of the younger son’s living in brief and simple terms,—“there wasted his substance with riotous living.” We might almost imagine that the compassionate Jesus in the telling of this story shrank from branding the erring one with crime worse than mere improvident living. The stinging words imputed to the elder brother bring out the enormity of the sin in the fullness of its shame,—“hath devoured thy living with harlots.”

Shall we consider the fall of the younger son to have come about as rapidly as the transition of the thought in the single sentence setting it forth? While the downward path ending in destruction is as sure and finally a swift one, yet the beginning is an almost imperceptible descent. So let us imagine this was the case with this younger son in the city of Tyre.

The sale of the wool had been profitably managed. He had the money. He might now return home.

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But, why do so just yet? He is having a good time; he is enjoying independence, freedom from the control and restraint of home. His father and brother could manage affairs without him a little longer. He might even have the chance of making some money by staying at Tyre and taking advantage of the offer of a merchant to take him into a venture about to be made.

“It is so cool and delightful down by the sea, while at home the season is undoubtedly growing hot and distressing. There are such pleasant resorts at the seaside, and such jolly companions there too. I may not have another chance soon to be in Tyre, so I might as well enjoy myself now!” Thus his home-going was put off and put off. His venture with the merchant furnished an excuse for this. Indeed, he had gotten into so many things that he sent word to his father to dispose of what property of

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his was still left, and to send on the proceeds, which he knew he could use to good advantage in Tyre.

What a tale the messenger had to tell the eager listeners in that little town upon his return from delivering the money to the younger son. “He was arrayed in purple and fine linen. He is living like a prince. Surely he is prospering!”

Apparently this was the case with the younger son. When first he came to Tyre he had lived quietly, unostentatiously, by himself. But that grew tiresome and lonely. It made him homesick to go about unrecognized amid the crowds, and uncheered by companionship upon his return. Every one was too much engrossed in their own affairs to give the stranger a thought. So he began to yearn for that genial, hearty good-fellowship, which he had with friends at home and which was a part of his nature. Did he find a kindly refuge in the

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synagogue or in the temples, where as a stranger he was passed by with a mere glance? He found more of a welcome with his business acquaintances. And it was through one of these that he found a cordial reception among a little jovial circle of kindred spirits. The presence of a newcomer modified their talk, somewhat toned down their jests. Yet even then the younger son felt slightly embarrassed at what he chided himself with as boorishness, “since of course he had not the wider knowledge of life as these city fellows had.” But he found his opinions were given a certain deference, his jokes boisterously appreciated, his ambitions and plans listened to with some seriousness.

So little by little he became amalgamated with this coterie where goes on the happy, free, careless consideration of one another’s joys and sorrows, hopes and loves. With his impetuous good-fellowship, with his openly frank

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nature, with his ready generosity, the younger son soon came to the flattering position of being considered indispensable to that little group when they were to be off for a good time. And they nicknamed him “The Prodigal.”

Having a good time is undoubtedly often wrongly judged to consist in getting well filled with “good” wine. All trouble’s drowned, all pleasure’s afloat in a beliquored brain. But returning consciousness serves as a wrecking company and grim reality again grins at you. Water was perhaps not such a safe and popular drink in the days of the Prodigal as now. Wine was probably then as it is now used mistakenly as a sign of social prestige or affluence.

Money made by the Prodigal’s first fortunate venture went into other more questionable ones and into the setting up of that establishment which dazzled the eyes of the country messenger. This place became the rendezvous of

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the Prodigal’s first genial companions and of others whom he later attracted himself. These were not such friends as he should have had. They were not the true, lifelong friends of his old home. They were the transient, flattering self-seekers of a parasitic class, ready to live where a living could be more easily grasped.

When reckless extravagance and successful business ventures began to cast a warning shadow across the Prodigal’s table and upon his face; when curtailed hospitality led the former cronies to declare “the latest cook is vile,” “the velvet carpets are badly worn,” “things are becoming horribly in need of refurnishing,” and “Circe is not dressing as she used to and her jewels are disappearing;” when a little loan was less leniently forgotten by the Prodigal and the golden glint disappeared from among his coins; then it was that former friendly grasps loosened. He was not

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as indispensable as he used to be at certain gatherings. Why, it was even said that Perseus had passed him without deigning to make him a salutation.

Thus did the Prodigal undoubtedly realize what certain kinds of friendship really are. He would have agreed with an early Roman philosopher who under similar experiences of life as lived amid the ancient civilization wrote sharply of such friendship as he had seen. Said he,—“For universally, be not deceived, every animal is attached to nothing so much as to its own interests. Whatever then appears to be an impediment to this interest, whether this be a brother, or a child, or beloved, or lover, it hates, spurns, curses; for it is its nature to love nothing so much as its own interests; this is father and brother, and kinsman, and God.—But you may say, Such a one treated me with regard so long; and did he not love me?

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How do you know, slave, if he did not regard you in the same way he wipes his shoes with a sponge, or as he takes care of his beast? How do you know, when you have ceased to be useful as a vessel, he will not throw you away like a broken platter?” (Epictetus’ Discourses.)

The Prodigal was broken in fortune, in friendship, probably in health. A famine was on in the land. “He began to be in want.” Yes literally “he began to be behind,” and unpaid bills were harder and harder to settle. Business was depressed and failure ahead. The future faced him like a fiendish foe. He had wasted his substance with riotous living.

The Prodigal had drunk the cup of pleasure to the dregs. What was it all to him now? Nothing! and less than nothing, “Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” (Eccl. i. 2.) The dream at an end. Everything vanished. Repu-

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tation gone! Honor gone!! Virtue gone!!! Nothing left but his worthless self. And why let it longer mock him? Why not with a few drops of poison and one short, sharp spasm shake off all worldly woe, as had Circe done when he cast her off. Or, why not with the few coins left, once more with wine woo forgetfulness, and before waking to want, with his dagger, like the false and ill-fated friend Perseus, let wine and life escape together?

Ah no! his hand is stayed. Not by an angel as with Abraham’s descending, daggered hand. But the feeble voice of a reviving conscience frightens him from the deed. Fear lays hold upon him; fear of an angry and outraged God. Dare he face that God with his useless, polluted, sinful record? No! For the Proverbs say, “The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord.” (xv. 9.) So he must put off that dread ordeal

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of God’s condemnation. Nor would he let his former companions have the chance to jest at his untimely end. He would not add to his record this final shame and cause his father deeper sorrow.

Alas! his poor father! The Prodigal could not bear to face him after the heartless conduct which had made him unworthy a father’s love. He would not turn toward home now. He would go elsewhere that he might be blotted out of the father’s existence and memory. Yet the Prodigal must live, and live he could not in the city. He has no skill which would be in demand even if labor were not then a drug on the market. So using his last coin, he turns to his old occupation and gets away to join himself to a farmer.

His life in Tyre had sadly changed the Prodigal. He is not fit for the work he used to do on his father’s farm. Half-sick, weak, with bloated

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face and repulsive appearance, he found it hard to persuade the farmer to give him even such a menial and degraded position as that of swineherd.

Day by day he sat in the field watching the swine. Day after day he heard no voice but that of his conscience no longer stifled by the laughing voices of companions or by seductive sound of flattery. Night after night did visions of his gay life haunt him. Night and again would he take his meagre pay to the public house. For it was hard to quench that old thirst and it was easy to sink into a stupefaction blotting out all memory and all conscience.

The Prodigal was fast falling lower than the hogs he tended, “and he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him.” (Luke xv. 16.) Surely he was foully treated. No man gave unto him! and why

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should they give to him, a ragged, bloated, despondent swineherd? Would he not but change the helping gift for a damning drink? Might he not then in blinded frenzy like a senseless boar turn and rend the hand which had cast the pearls of charity before him?

“No man gave unto him,” yet that evident unkindness was a blessing to him. For the extreme pressure of want finally showed the Prodigal the contrast between the country and circumstances to which his sin had brought him and that plenty and peace which he had known at home. He sees that he is in want and suffering *not* through providential circumstances, *but* through his own misdoing. He realizes that the motive of his whole life has been unconsciously the service of self. He had enthroned self in the place of God and to his self-made God given homage and obedience. He laments the self-love

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which took him away from his father’s love. So the change comes from a mere loving for food and drink to a longing for the father’s love, long lost. He is now willing to go back as a humble penitent. He is now anxious to be near his father, if only as a hired servant. He wants to have his father’s kindly guiding hand direct his own young but weakened will. Oh! simply to be able to serve his father!

The Prodigal’s moral nature has awakened, his impulses are transformed, his life is changed. He has come to himself. He forsakes his old self and selfishness. He seeks a simple, serviceable life. He struggles back over the road which he thought led to fortune, but which he now agonizingly hopes may still lead to a loving and merciful father.

“When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.” (Luke xv. 20.) This

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reception was more than the Prodigal expected. It renders impossible his humble request to be received as a servant. The father’s love has anticipated the confession of sin and wrong, which was flowing from the humbled, grateful, and thoroughly penitent heart. This was more strengthening, more welcome to the Prodigal’s changed heart than were the fatted calf and feast to his weakened constitution.

One thing was lacking to the complete joy of the Prodigal’s return. All the elder brother’s unkindness was not forgotten by the younger brother, who longed for his forgiveness and forgetting sympathy also. But the elder brother was one of those unfortunate natures which can never forget and which seldom forgive. “What means this sound of gayety which strikes his ears as he approaches the house!” Impassive, proud, haughty and portly, the elder brother calls to a

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servant and demands the meaning of what he hears. The servant replies, “Thy brother is come and thy father hath killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound.” (Luke xv. 27.) “And he was angry and would not go in.”

Indeed he was angry. “When had he been given half such a feast and celebration as was prepared for this wanton spendthrift? Had not that one now returned simply to live on the savings of him who had worked hard day by day instead of seeing the world and living in idleness! No! He would not go in.”

“Therefore came the father and entreated the elder son.” But the father’s loving appeal for a brother’s sympathy toward him who had sinned and suffered for his sin, brings forth this answer,—“Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments: and yet thou never gavest me a kid

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that I might make merry with my friends.”

The father does not deny this and his reply,—“Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine,” shows that the elder brother had not yet dispossessed the father of the portion falling to him, and that indeed he was a dutiful son; his life had been constant, conscientious and moral. But there was a lack of heart and absence of affection. His blamelessness was external and not of the heart. The elder brother by his words even showed the narrowed selfishness.

He might have been given a kid for a feast with his friends as an occasional reward for his faithful industry. No kid for me! But a fatted calf for him who gained the name of “Prodigal” in Tyre! Not even the least for me who had been so unlike this fellow! Nothing for me the “Unprodigal”! But the elder by the words hereby used to justify his blame of the fallen

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brother, at the same time reveals his own nature. His nature was as coldly selfish as that younger brother's had been impetuously selfish. It was as the servile disposition of a hired servant, counting only the gain, and was not the spirit of a devoted son to a loving and deserving father. It was that narrow-minded temperament which can see actions in only one light; and that light is the dimmed one of their own narrow experience, and of their own bigoted, low-grade, but highly intensive imagination.

The elder brother was undoubtedly intended by Christ to represent that class which he was continually denouncing in such scathing words as they most truly deserved. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.” (Matt. xxiii. 27.) “Woe unto

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you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” (Matt. xxiii. 23.) “Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye.” (Matt. vii. 5.) “It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found again.”

The intenseness of interest in this story of the Prodigal centres in the restoration. “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke xv. 10.) A son regained! A sinner saved! A brother resurrected! Should not the feelings of the elder brother as well as of the father have been like the supreme joyousness of Mary and Martha when Christ called forth Lazarus from the reeking tomb?

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But, do you not suspect that the elder brother’s heart was dead, and could not feel for another? The only true, full throbbing heart in the story is that of the father. One heart dead in the coldest of respectable selfishness! One heart almost stopped through the selfish clogging with pleasures! One heart beating on through surrender of property, blow to family honor, loss of loved one! Why did the father’s heart still thus beat and warm into renewed life one who was dead in trespasses and sin? Because subserviency of selfish thought for his own good had not quite killed the life of his heart! The father thought first of his sons, then of himself. The sons thought first of themselves, and then of their father, if they thought at all. They would take all the good gifts he could give unto them, and give nothing in return.

Thus in the life of the Prodigal son is seen the effect of gifts, good in

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themselves and to him seemingly so. These he asked and obtained. A loving father bestowed them. But the intended benefit, the much desired things brought degradation, misery, and a narrow escape from death, earthly and eternal.

Think you not that the Prodigal did not with his declining fortune utter *prayers* for help and escape? Yet no saving success but dire disaster turned up to his seeking. Still the evil was turned into good, for he came to himself, realized his selfishness, and went to knock as a suppliant at his father’s door. “Father I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.” *That* submissive, humble and faltering prayer was more than answered.

It was Christ in the agony of Gethsemane prayed,—“O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” (Matt. xxvi. 39.) We,

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too, pray,—“O God, give me the portion of goods that should fall to me! As I will, Thou shalt do!!” Our prayers are answered. But the promise is often fortunately fulfilled so differently from what we sought. We get not the goods we coveted; we get nothing; or, we get even worse than nothing. Yet in this contrary fulfillment of our petition we are sometimes by the very disappointment given a divine gift, which is the discernment of what it would be wiser for us to seek.

What can we ask and receive? “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm li. 10.) What can we seek and find? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matt. vi. 33.) What shall be opened to our knocking? “Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast

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a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.” (Rev. iii. 8.) “I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” (John xiv. 6.)

Truly, no man cometh unto the Father, nor cometh unto a right understanding of gifts, except he learn of Christ. Better leave the gold hidden in the earth than to hide it as a miser’s hoard. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark viii. 36.) Ah, it is the spiritual which is of far more value than the material. Christ declares it. HE, who sought less in this world than the foxes with their holes and the birds with their nests, reveals the worth of things to lie not in themselves but in the spirit with which they are given or received.

An unselfish, loving, consecrated purpose is the talisman which will bring God’s best gifts unto us. A

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thoughtful, loving, sympathetic spirit is the alchemist’s stone which will change our trifling gifts into an inestimable treasure in the hand and in the heart of the receiver. Let us seek for ourselves, and let us endeavor to be the means of extending to others that greatest of blessings which is the gift of God, eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Benediction: “Now, unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with an exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and forever. Amen.”

Fishers of Men

The text is in the fourth chapter of the gospel according to St. Matthew, the nineteenth verse:—"And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

"Fishers of men" is now a familiar phrase, but to those Galilean fishermen, Simon and Peter, it must have sounded strange. It was a call to a new mode of living. In the early morning as they were casting a net into the sea, these words were wafted across to them:—"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." We can imagine how Simon and Andrew, with half-lowered net, stopped in surprise to see whence came such words. It seems likely from the setting of the incident, and from the narratives in

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Mark and Luke (i. 18; v. 4-10), that the night was a bad one for fishing. The two brothers were perhaps moaning their luck as they made this one last cast, which they hoped would bring them something to make their long night's toil not wholly unprofitable.

At this moment, the words of the text smote upon the ears of these Galilean fishermen. A strange contrast was brought to their minds; they were working at their daily occupation and failure crowned their efforts. But this strange suggestion, "Fishers of men," what could it mean, and in that unusual vocation what success would crown their endeavors?

The source of these unexpected words, Simon and Peter found to be the lips of one who was as marvellous as His utterances; it was Jesus of Nazareth. Not unknown to them was this strange teacher, for He had publicly taught in Galilee and repeated the

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warning cry of John the Baptist,—
“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven
is at hand.” At Nazareth also He had
in the synagogue declared the prophecy
of Isaiah fulfilled in Himself, the Mes-
siah who was heralded by John in the
wilderness.

What could Jesus mean? “Follow
Me,” they could not understand, for it
was the custom of the rabbis to gather
a circle of disciples about themselves
as masters. So this was a call to be-
come permanent disciples of Jesus as
a teacher. This they were ready to
do. But in calling these first apostles
into active fellowship with Him, Jesus
does it at such a time and with such
words that it serves at the same mo-
ment as an object lesson to them.

Simon and Andrew were fishermen.
Yet as “fishers of men” instead of
“catchers of fish” they would find
many experiences similar to those in
their former occupation. They had just
been disappointed in their labor to

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take the fish from the deep. They would often be disappointed in their attempt to lead erring souls from bondage of sin to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. They had often contended with the fury of the storms, but the buffetings of nature would soon seem to them a time of joy as they for Jesus' sake withstood the hostility of the priestly class, the calumny of the learned scribes, and the fierce onslaught of the surging masses of the common rabble. Could they weather the storms ahead of them as well as they had those of the Lake of Galilee?

Yes; for they would use that tireless persistence which is characteristic of fishermen; they would the long night through, struggle in prayer against temptation and for the souls of sinners, as they had tugged at the sails or strained at the nets.

There would also be a contrast between their new and their old lives. Not simply that they would be labor-

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ing for men instead of for fish, but that whereas they had caught fish for the death and destruction of the fish, now they would catch men for life and salvation. Furthermore, the greatest change would be seen in their own lives. Commonplace, obscure and unknown Galilean fishermen had they been. Extraordinary, famous men were they to be; the world-famed apostles of Jesus Christ; founders of the early church which was to grow into a world-wide power; and Simon surnamed Peter was to be the spokesman and leader of that world-revolutionizing band of disciples of Christ to die a martyr's death, and to have a mighty institution built upon his name.

What wrought such a change in the lives of those two unknown and undeveloped fishermen?—It was the call "Follow Me" which led them to learn of Christ, the way of life, not selfishly for themselves but unselfishly

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for whomsoever was astray or adrift. —It was the changed energy of their lives and the transformed natural instincts whereby Christ indeed fulfilled in them the promise, “I will make you fishers of men.”

Fishing was the business of Simon and Andrew. They may have followed this occupation either from choice or from the necessity and circumstances of their surroundings. However that may be, there seems to be a natural instinct in man to fish. Where is the man who has not at one end of a line been broiled in the sun or soaked in the rain? Where is the boy who has not with twine and bent pin tried to lure a finny prize from—even the nearest mud-puddle? Ah! that love of catching something; that inborn instinct of pursuit and conquest which fires the breast of every man and woman.

Consider what a fortunate thing it is that we possess this quality. With-

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out it man would have remained the barbarian, the mere brute man, content to live solely an existence of eating and drinking and sleeping. With it he has been restless in the desire to catch larger game, hence primitive man contrived his spears and axes of stone, and then in time of bronze and of iron until his needs were met. For his convenience and comfort he no longer left the sun sole god of fire but robbed him of his supremacy by rubbing two sticks together. Wrapping himself in the skins of his slaughtered prey, he defied the hostile blasts of winter. And thus has man ever been conquering nature, beasts, his own fellows and in turn himself, until now, in our days we see civilization ripening into the fruitage foreshadowed when God planted a divine spark within man. But the end is not yet. Greater victories must still be won by man. Yes, even in our ordinary daily life we must lay hold on

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this quality and exercise it to keep from being overcome by the dangers or evils which would else conquer us.

Simon and Andrew the fishermen heeded Christ's words, followed Him, became His disciples. We must of course grant that all men are not called to follow Christ in the way these two were. They were called into the immediate and intimate circle of Christ's personal companionship and work, as we might almost to-day say a minister of the gospel is called. Still as we all should be disciples of Christ in greater or less degree of intimate service, we can each profit by the suggestive incidents of the text.

The call, "Follow Me," as we have seen, meant to take Jesus as a teacher. Each of us here realizes the need and the importance of conforming our lives to the wise and beneficial standard established by Christ. Our happiness, usefulness and success in life will depend upon the degree in which

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we cultivate and acquire the virtues of meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, brotherly love, undoubtedly we all have these at times, but not all the time. Hence we must have perseverance to make these important qualities permanent. For Christ said,—“If ye *continue* in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John viii. 31b-32.)

In the fisherman's life is there a good illustration of this quality of continuing, persevering, and mastering difficulties. It was eminently seen in the life of the first called fishing apostle, Simon Peter, and one such incident occurs after the call described. For it seems according to the accounts of the Synoptists compared, that after calling Simon and Andrew and then the two sons of Zebedee, a throng of people were already crowding about Christ, eager to hear His words of power. To be heard the better by the

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multitude, Christ enters the boat of Peter and is pushed off from shore. When He had finished speaking He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." "And Simon answering said, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the nets." Then was taken that miraculous draught of fishes which seems a reward to the patiently persevering Peter after his long night of fruitless toil, and which also seems to have been a foreshadowing of the miraculous in-gathering of three thousand souls at the day of Pentecost by the down-pouring of the Holy Spirit and under the influence of the earnest and eloquent words of this erstwhile fisherman.

Peter had also launched out into the deep when to his trained eye and human knowledge there seemed no promise of success. Yet with faith in

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his Master he bent to the task of meeting and taking the as yet unseen fish. Cannot this thought help us, that the unseen, unknown, the to us uncertain future, are all known to our Lord and Master? All that He requires of us is, that to become victors over the unseen and perhaps the fear and dread of it, we trust His all-wise providence, for we shall "through faith inherit the promises." (Heb. iv. 12.)

Again upon going after the unseen Peter was taxed to the utmost of his strength and skill to take in that multitude of fish. Likewise are our fullest efforts demanded in life. Our conquest over ourselves, sin, and evil is frequently a painful struggle, but it is childish to complain for a man's glory is to endure and from weakness to become strong and wax valiant in the fight. Then shall we be crowned with the glory of victory and success and realize as a certain writer has said, that: "Pains are blows of the

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hammer knocking off the rough outside of the geode to realize the beautiful crystals within. Troubles are blows lifted upon the dungeon door for giving the prisoner release. Sufferings are stamp-mills crushing the quartz that the gold may be free." (N. D. Hillis-Foret Immort.)

Realizing the benefits which result from this determination of character, and endurance of afflictions, we can appreciate the significant words of another writer who says,—“How much is missed in life through feebleness of resolve, a lack of decision! How many are the invertebrate souls, lacking in will and void in purpose, who, instead of piercing waves and conquering the flow of adverse tides, like the medusa, can only drift, all limp and languid, in the current of circumstance! Such men do not make apostles; they are but ciphers of flesh and blood, of no value by themselves, and only of any worth as they are attached

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to the unit of some stronger will. A poor broken thing is a life spent in the subjunctive mood, among the "mights" and "shoulds," where "I will" waits upon "I would"! That is the truest, worthiest life that is divided between the indicative and the imperative. As in shaking pebbles the smaller ones drop to the bottom, their place determined by their size, so in the shaking together of human lives, in the rub and jostle of the world, the strong wills invariably come to the top." (Burton-Gosp. Luke, 167.)

Simon the obscure Galilean fisherman became the chief of the apostles. He followed Christ; he learned of Christ; he toiled by the side of Christ; he subdued his own nature through Christ; he caught men from death unto life in Christ; he dwells forever in glory with Christ.

May not we have this in part said of us? God grant it! Yet it depends not upon God but upon ourselves. It

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depends upon how well we learn our lesson from the life of Simon Peter, the catcher of fish and the fisher of men. His was a life given to these lines of work. Ours is a life needing the frequent exercise of those qualities seen in Peter's.

At the seashore I have seen a fisherman stand in his boat while it was drifting or being rowed by another, and casting his line far into the rocky shore pull it quickly back, trolling through the water. Then out would shoot his line again, and back be drawn. Thus have I seen the fisherman skirting the shore, come into sight and slowly pass into the dim distance, ever casting and casting, but drawing in naught except the untouched bait. "What a weary, monotonous life!" I have thought. "Aye, and how weary and monotonous are our lives" may some of you say.

But in the evening sit at the thresh-

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old of some humble fisher's cottage, and with brightened eye will he tell of the fish he has caught, with lowered voice tell of the mysteries of the sea, with swelling breast tell of the storms he has weathered. Similarly shall we look back in the evening of life, and recounting the struggles, the temptations, the victories of our career, rejoice to say in the words of St. Paul, —“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.” (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.)

I would not, however, defer to that far distant day the exultation of a righteous life. There is a present joy amid the very weariness of the struggle of a righteous life. To overcome, sends a thrill of new life through our veins; to be overcome, saps the last vestige of our energy. You may have dropped your line lazily over the side

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of a boat in the early morn, but as the sun mounts the heavens your foot lags toward home, unless you are weighted down with some catch. All day long may you have followed the rocky slope of the winding, dashing, splashing trout stream, clambering over slippery stones, waist deep in the water, trying with one fly after another to lure the speckled prey from its haunts, but in the dusk your weary homeward steps still have the springing tread of joy, if you bear a few shining prizes of skill and untiring effort.

Don't forget as you go forth to your daily call of life, that you can be a fisher of men; for many an erring soul has been caught by a warm hand grasp and kindly word of sympathy; many a blackened life has risen from the murky depths of sin at the gleam of a bright smile and friendly encouragement. So neglect not the gift that is within you.

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Don't expect a man to be led from sin to salvation by your first word. As you choose your bait in fishing, so you must choose your way of helping each man. A piece of red flannel may do for a crab, an angle-worm for a sun fish, but to catch a trout you need a carefully feathered hook, a pliant rod and reel. The common saying is "you catch more flies with molasses than you can with vinegar." So in the catching of fish and of men, be wise, be patient, be kind. The kindness of Christ need be yours lest the sin-sore soul shrink within itself by boorish handling. A fish cannot be jerked from the water as soon as you feel the pull. Jerk, and your fish will go away with a torn mouth or with your last hook. No! you can't be hasty and harsh. You must play your fish by giving him the line when he makes a mad dash from you. Then when the line slackens, you can pull him toward you. As long as you

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keep the fish on the hook, each wild rush will but tire, while each reeling in will be nearer the shore. Thus, gently and patiently lead a sinner to Christ. Despair not. Each wild dash and relapse into sin will but tire and disgust a man if you keep in touch with him. While the hold which you retain may draw him gradually nearer the cross. Be thoughtfully sympathetic and you have attracted and hooked; be perseveringly patient and you have played and landed a sinner at Christ's feet. He will in mercy bend, bless, change that life which would have been wasted, or worse, eternally lost. So neglect not the gift that is within you.

You all know your own weaknesses. Then like a fisherman beholding a school of fish and drawing his seine around them, do you draw the net of Christ's purifying love and help about your frailties, and cast them forth to perish upon the sands of self-search-

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ing and under the burning rays of the Holy Spirit's power. For

“Men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.”

You have all at some time in life tasted the joy of achievement. Call to mind the past happiness of conquering some difficulty, some infirmity, and “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And—put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Phil. iv. 23.)

The wisdom of the Proverbs declares,—

“Behold the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth.

“How much more the wicked and the sinner! (xi. 31.)

“The wicked earneth deceitful wages.

“But he that soweth righteousness hath a sure reward.” (xi. 18.)

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Benediction: "Now, unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with an exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and forever. Amen."

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